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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 002128

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PL](#)
SUBJECT: MUD-SLINGING CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO A CLOSE WITH
OUTCOME TOO CLOSE TO CALL

REF: WARSAW 2001 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: Political Counselor Mary T. Curtin for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Poles will go to vote this Sunday with increasingly stark campaign ad messages of "disaster" in the health sector, a fresh corruption scandal carefully timed for maximum political impact, and a dash of anti-Semitism to add to the campaign. The final week has seen spirited mud-slinging by both the Law and Justice (PiS) government and a suddenly revived opposition Civic Platform (PO). PO's Donald Tusk may be peaking at exactly the right moment, after successfully characterizing PM Kaczynski in last week's debate as an anachronism fixated on the past. A PO victory will hinge on urban and student/young adult turnout. PiS has deftly manipulated a new scandal, attempting to scare voters with ads that suggest that average Poles will die for lack of affordable health care if PO wins and privatizes hospitals. PO leads most polls, but methods and margins of error leave the race too close to call. End Summary.

PiS Uses Scare Tactics on Health Care

¶2. (C) Donald Tusk emerged the clear victor in his two debates, first against PM Kaczynski (October 12) and then against Left and Democrats (LiD) leader Aleksandr Kwasniewski (October 15), as the clear victor, and PO entered the critical, final week of the campaign in a stronger position, with many polls indicating a slender lead over PiS in this weekend's election. One observer told us he thought Tusk "won" because he succeeded in painting Kaczynski as an anachronism, obsessed with the past, when what Poland needed was pragmatic approaches to build the future. TV and internet ads, both PO and independently sponsored, blame the Kaczynskis for the flood of migrants to England and Ireland, and warn of their "undemocratic" methods. Some polling indicates more people plan to vote than last time, which would favor PO.

¶3. (C) Undaunted, or perhaps concerned about PO's surge, PiS rolled out a new campaign ad that features Minister of Health Zbigniew Religa suggesting that average Poles will die for lack of affordable medical care if PO proceeds with plans to privatize hospitals. (Religa had actually supported some privatization of hospitals in an August interview with Newsweek.) On October 17, President Kaczynski vowed to veto any legislation that calls for hospital privatization. PiS spin doctor Adam Bielan moreover allegedly provided former President Kwasniewski's campaign staff with health care talking points for Kwasniewski's use for the Tusk debate. PO has tried to make a campaign issue of what it says is a brewing health care crisis, pointing to the recent evacuation

of hospital patients from several hospitals after striking doctors left the patients unattended.

A Fresh Corruption Scandal, Artfully Presented to the Public

¶4. (C) PiS has made use of a fresh political scandal involving a former PO politician to capture considerable public attention in the campaign's final days. On October 1, PO MP Beata Sawicka was caught red-handed accepting a bribe in a corruption sting operation involving property in the seaside resort of Hel. Sawicka was detained for questioning but (owing to her parliamentary immunity) promptly released. PO subsequently drummed her out of the party, and removed her as its Senate candidate in Legnica. The Central Anti-Corruption Office (CBA), which orchestrated the sting, made assurances that Sawicka's case would not be exploited for political gain before the election. Nonetheless, on October 16 CBA Chief Mariusz Kaminski held a slick press conference providing details of Sawicka's case, baldly using the investigation to try to shift public attention back to PiS's preferred campaign theme--fighting corruption. Tusk decried the use of CBA in a "determined and deliberate" way to manipulate the election, charging that PM Kaczynski uses lies and insinuations as a primary political tool. Political observers and opinion polls tell us that while PO voters will agree with Tusk and be disgusted by the methods, a solid 30 % of the public see the action as a positive step toward ending corruption, which should help keep PiS voters on track.

Iraq Attacks Draw Attention
but Do Not Appear to Have
Significant Electoral Impact

¶5. (C) The October 3 attack on Polish Ambassador to Iraq,

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Edward Pietrzyk, and subsequent bomb blasts near the Polish Embassy put the issue of the Iraq war back on the front page, and fostered some renewed debate about Poland's continuing deployment there, but failed to galvanize anti-war sentiments. If anything, the attacks stiffened the Polish resolve to not be dictated to by terrorists. Politicians have remained resolute in de-linking previous calls for orderly withdrawal from the recent bombings. Tusk said that "no Polish government, neither this one nor the future one that PO will form, should give in to acts of terror..." He stressed that PO's long-standing position to withdraw troops from Iraq was not influenced by recent events. PO Sejm candidate (and former PiS Minister of Defense) Radek Sikorski echoed Tusk's comments that Poland should focus on Afghanistan. Even Andrzej Lepper, whose party is virulently anti-war, noted that any withdrawal from Iraq should be done in an orderly fashion, and not before mid-2008. Defense Minister Aleksandr Szczyglo's criticism of the opposition for politicizing Iraq failed to gain much response.

LPR Fails to Gain with anti-Iraq War Ad

¶6. (C) With its fortunes failing, the League of Polish Families (LPR) apparently did not regain any ground with its release this week of the first anti-war commercial of the campaign. The spot showed flag-draped coffins, crazed Iraqi mobs, and, under the banner "allies," images of President Kaczynski with President Bush and with Jewish leaders at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The ad primarily attacks Poland's involvement in Iraq (which LPR has long opposed), but also smacks of anti-Semitism, as was quickly pointed out by a rash of critical stories in the international press. The anti-Semitism and the exploitation of images of dead soldiers were denounced by Polish politicians including the Kaczynskis and PO leaders. Israeli Ambassador David Peleg told poloff that his government expressly decided to say nothing for fear

of drawing more attention to LPR. Despite the ad, LPR's fortunes are poor, consistently polling well below the five percent parliamentary threshold.

17. (C) Agrarian populist Andrzej Lepper, the leader of Self-Defense (SO), has been virtually absent from the scene; it would appear that the angry farmers of years past are more satisfied with their lot since Poland's entry into the EU, and it seems likely that SO will not meet the five percent threshold for representation in the Sejm. Conversely, the once-failing Polish Peasants' Party, led by former Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak, has regained ground--as representing perhaps not-so-angry farmers--and may be a kingmaker in post-election coalition jockeying.

Gaming Out Possible Post-Election Coalitions

18. (C) With the likelihood that the election will result in PiS and PO at nearly equal strength, attention is shifting toward what kind of post-election coalition is possible. Most of the combinations pose difficulties for the possible members. If it wins (and PM Kaczynski said today he fully expects to win and to keep his job), some see a coalition with PSL, supplemented by PO defectors. Enticing PSL to the table, however, after rejecting them repeatedly, may be tough. Many say PSL would not agree. If PiS wins, PO will be in a very difficult spot. It fears that if it goes into coalition with PiS in the lead, PiS will work night and day to destroy it as it destroyed LPR and SO. But senior PO leader Waldy Dzikowski admitted to poloff on October 12 that anything was possible; and Bozena Bukiewicz, a PO MP from Zielona Gora, also told poloff that PO would have to be in the next government, or would surely fall apart.

19. (C) PO has more options if it comes in first place. As reported reftel, the "natural" coalition is PO-PSL. Adding LiD would be hard for the more conservative PO members to swallow, although a "grand coalition" between PO-PSL-LiD is conceivable, according to Lena Bobinska, who spoke to poloffs on October 18. And although Tusk declared that a coalition with Jaroslaw Kaczynski was impossible to conceive, he notably did not rule out a possible PO-led coalition with PiS (which would leave Jaroslaw out of the government but leading PiS). Many political leaders (such as a group of mainly PO-oriented mayors of large cities with whom the Ambassador had lunch recently) see an unstable coalition leading to elections again in less than two years. Election silence begins at midnight Friday. Turnout for the election--especially among the young and among urban dwellers generally, will be the key.

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